

SOCIAL BIOLOGY

The Address at the Inauguration of the New Chair

THE first English Professor of Social Biology, Professor Lancelot Hogben, delivered his inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics and Political Science on the afternoon of October 23rd, a lecture that sparkled with compressed epigrams directed sometimes at the Socialist and sometimes at the 'Die-hard,' at the rationalist and the Christian, at social worker or at pure biologist, and even at ourselves, the eugenisists, with, of course, equal thrusts at those who doubt the animal nature of man. Indeed, his rapier glanced among all mankind and left his hearers sure that, whatever else might characterize the new Chair, it would lack neither intellectual brightness nor literary grace. The following summary but poorly illustrates these characteristic qualities.

THE DESCENT OF MAN

Darwin's *Descent of Man*, said Professor Hogben, was a challenge to the complacent dualism which had permitted utilitarian science and humanistic philosophy to pursue an independent course from the days of the schoolmen to the middle of the nineteenth century. To-day it was evident that the social sciences could no longer progress within the framework of a philosophical tradition brought into being by the conditions of the city state and nurtured from Abelard to Kant in servile association with the requirements of apologetics. Economic science had already severed its moorings to moral philosophy, and there was a growing disposition among the other branches of social science to do the same.

To-day the application of scientific method to the study of human society was philosophically guaranteed by the generally accepted conclusion that millionaires and metaphysicians, statesmen and seventh-day adventists were products of the same secular agencies as had fashioned the rest of the

brute creation. The far-reaching implications of the change in outlook which Darwin's doctrine had brought about were becoming more apparent in our time, because biologists were now undertaking the analysis of the characteristics of conscious behaviour in animals, and the behaviourist school of psychologists was applying the new methods to man himself.

ANTS AND ANTIQUARIANS

Man was an animal as the ant was an animal, and he had a natural history of his own as the ant had a natural history of its own. The biologist as a biologist confined his attention to those characteristics which ants and antiquarians had in common, while the sociologist confined his inquiries to certain characteristics which distinguished men and women from ants and all other animals. Their respective fields of investigation overlapped in the attempt to define what characteristics of human society were determined by those characteristics which men share with all other animals, and what characteristics of human society were referable to characteristics which distinguish men as one species of animal from all other species of animals.

We must be prepared to recognize that issues which made the first claim on the attention of men like Huxley, Galton and Spencer were no longer topical. The misguided opposition of the churches compelled biologists of Darwin's generation to concentrate on emphasizing the characteristics which we shared with other animals. Social biology had now to undertake the task of defining in biologically significant terms the characteristics which distinguish man as one species of animal from all other species of animals. The work of physiologists like Sherrington and Pavlov was opening the way to a biological interpretation of those peculiarities which are most diagnostic of

the human species. A well-balanced view of the role respectively played by inheritance and social tradition in determining the differences which distinguished different social groups would only be possible when the biological study of behaviour and the methods of the geneticist could be brought into working harmony.

RESEARCH AND PROPAGANDA

The great danger lay in undue haste to establish conclusions which could be made the basis of legislation. The genetic basis of occupational and racial stratification in human societies was a problem which called for discipline, detachment, and restraint. Nothing could make the exercise of these wholesome virtues more difficult than to bring issues which were still problematical to scientists before the forum of political controversy. Much research directed to elucidating genetic variations in human communities had been vitiated by a failure to envisage the complexity of the problem. A genuinely scientific analysis of genetic variation in human society would have to be sustained by the recognition that human society is an unique biological phenomenon, inasmuch as the family is a unit for the cumulative communication of old and new environmental stimuli, as well as a group delimited by genetic affinity. The pre-eminent need of the moment was investigation rather than propaganda. The first task of the social biologist was not to advocate the sterilization of the unfit, but to undertake the sterilization of the instruments of research before operating on the body politic.

In our own generation the population problem embraced a variety of issues in which the sociologist and the biologist had a common interest. A clear appreciation of the biological issues necessitated the prosecution of research into the physiology of reproduction, the genetic basis of human behaviour, and the incidence of changes in fertility. The analysis of this intricate problem would not be facilitated by an unduly alarmist attitude. The sceptical inquirer might approach the differential fertility of

the social classes which has accompanied the decline in the birth rate as a conundrum rather than a catastrophe. We had inadequate scientific evidence to justify the belief that extensive genetic differences distinguished the social classes. If we had such knowledge it would be necessary to ascertain how such differences were transmitted before justifying the belief that a temporary disparity in fertility would necessarily produce significant social consequences. The German and Swedish data suggested that contraceptive practice was rapidly spreading to all sections of the community; so that differential fertility might be a problem which would solve itself without legislative interference.

On the other hand, if this transpired to be the case, it was possible that European communities would be faced with a rapid decline in general population, which would create a new constellation of social problems for legislative treatment. The decline in the birth rate brought us face to face with the fact that human society was entering upon what Mr. J. B. S. Haldane had called the era of biological invention; and the institution of a chair of social biology was an implicit recognition of the impending change. The rapid progress now being made in physiology made it likely that in the near future human society would be in a position to regulate the reproductive process to an extent and in ways hitherto unimagined and unimaginable.

In many directions it would be necessary for the social biologist to co-operate with pure sociology in ascertaining the significant factors which operate in determining the growth of human populations. On the other hand, social biology could not develop fruitfully if it isolated itself from the methods of experimental inquiry. By the very complexity of the genetic problem social biology was committed to create a framework of biological research and teaching in which a new type of social psychology could develop. For the same reason it was entrusted with the experimental analysis of aspects of the physiology of reproduction too long neglected by medical science.